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FM AMEMBASSY KYIV
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6771
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L KYIV 002305

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/24/2018
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SUBJECT: NEGOTIATIONS ON NEW RADA SPEAKER AT A STALEMATE

REF: KYIV 2245

Classified By: Ambassador William Taylor for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

Summary

11. (C) As Ukraine nears the two-week mark since the November 12 removal of Parliament (Rada) Speaker Arseniy Yatsenyuk, negotiations over his replacement are at a stalemate, claimed Speaker contenders and other political leaders in meetings with the Ambassador. None described a clear way out of the current impasse. President Yushchenko encouraged all parties to try to find a workable Rada coalition and new Speaker. He has curtailed, for now, his push for early Rada elections. Constitutional requirements for coalition-building limit the possible coalition variants. The severe lack of trust between Yushchenko, PM Tymoshenko, and other political leaders further complicates potential coalitions. End Summary.

The Rada -- Speakerless -- Adjourns for a Week

12. (U) On November 18 the Rada was unable to muster enough votes to hold debate over potential Speaker candidates. Instead, MPs voted to continue working in committees, spend the week of November 24 in constituent districts, and continue "consultations" on a new Speaker. The next Plenary session is scheduled for December 2. President Yushchenko has tempered his talk of early elections, announcing that elections would not take place in 2008. He is "sparing no effort" to support coalition talks. Pressed on whether Rada elections would be held in 2009, Yushchenko said that the 2009 budget should "envisage funds" for elections.

13. (C) The Ambassador has recently held a series of meetings with leading Speaker candidates, as well as ousted Speaker Yatsenyuk and Presidential Secretariat head Viktor Baloha to discuss the ongoing political crisis. All agreed that "something" had to be done to solve the political stalemate over the next Speaker, but none had a clear solution to the current impasse. All contended that a lack of trust among Ukraine's political leaders made any agreement more difficult to find.

Volodymyr Lytvyn -- The Man of the Hour?

14. (C) The Ambassador met with Volodymyr Lytvyn on November 19. Lytvyn, considered until recently to be the leading contender for the Speaker's chair, has said that he is not interested in a short-term speakership that presides over the dissolution of the current Rada and early elections. He said he would serve as speaker in "a coalition that unites Ukraine's politicians and its people." Lytvyn stressed to the Ambassador that the Rada was in a stalemate, adding that the complete lack of trust between Yushchenko and Tymoshenko was paralyzing the situation. Illustrating the point, Lytvyn

told the Ambassador he had had a deal with Tymoshenko under which he would become Speaker. After he went to a meeting with Yushchenko, however, Tymoshenko pulled her support, accusing Lytvyn of making a separate deal with the President. Lytvyn claimed that politicians are "too wrapped up in their rivalries" to focus on the economic crisis.

Ivan Plyush -- the Technocrat

15. (C) On November 21, OU-PSD MP Ivan Plyush, close Yushchenko ally and Rada Speaker from 1991 to 1994, told the Ambassador that, although a Rada without a Speaker is a terrible scenario for Ukraine, "it is the reality" that they face now. Plyush said that Yushchenko and Tymoshenko will never reach agreement "on anything" because they are "incompatible." Plyush refused to speculate on whether there was sufficient support within OU-PSD to align with Regions, with or without Lytvyn, telling the Ambassador that "that is Yushchenko's problem." Plyush contended that Ukraine needed a new Speaker and Prime Minister to work itself out of its political turmoil. He laid out a scenario in which Yushchenko would bring all political forces together under him to work together for the greater good.

Oleksandr Lavrynovych -- the Seat Warmer?

16. (C) In a November 24 meeting with the Ambassador, Acting Speaker Lavrynovych stressed that the Rada needed to elect an "effective, functioning" Speaker, and not just a placeholder. Short on detail, Lavrynovych told the Ambassador that Ukraine's opposing political forces have a history of, in the end, finding a way to cooperate. He was confident the Rada would find a way out of the current stalemate. Lavrynovych said that the Rada has shown the ability to find short-term majorities that, while passing necessary legislation, do not lead to coalitions. He said that an effective majority could be found to pass the 2009 budget, but he did not speculate on who would preside over such a majority as Speaker.

Arseniy Yatsenyuk -- the Former Speaker

17. (C) Yatsenyuk told the Ambassador on November 21 that there is no hope for a new coalition in the Rada, as all political leaders consider themselves to be "demigods" and can't work together. Yatsenyuk was sympathetic to Tymoshenko's positions, but said that Yushchenko's political career was "doomed." Yatsenyuk also had few kind words for Lytvyn, calling him "untrustworthy." Yatsenyuk appeared to harbor little bitterness at his ouster, and was focused on developing his new political party - Democratic Front. On November 24, OU-PSD MP Kseniya Lyapina publicly called for Yatsenyuk's reinstatement as Speaker.

Viktor Baloha -- the Bogeyman

18. (C) Echoing MP Plyush, Baloha told the Ambassador that Yushchenko wanted to unite all political powers around an economic agenda. He concluded that unity was unlikely as neither Regions head Viktor Yanukovych nor PM Tymoshenko were interested in sharing power, preferring to lead a coalition. Baloha said he told Yushchenko that he had to remove Yatsenyuk from the Speaker's chair, as he was "too close" to Tymoshenko, adding that Yatsenyuk sees himself as the "Ukrainian Obama," and a presidential contender. Baloha, a reported backer of a Yushchenko/Regions-led coalition, was somewhat defensive about Yanukovych's attendance at the United Russia party congress in Moscow and his provocative statements there on the Russia/Georgia conflict. Yatsenyuk told the Ambassador during their meeting that Baloha was at the center of the current political storm, and was largely responsible for what Plyush called Yushchenko's "isolation."

Comment

19. (C) While speculation and, ostensibly, negotiation continues over the next Rada Speaker, the leading candidates for the post were unable, or unwilling, to outline a realistic solution to Ukraine's ongoing political turmoil. With a week without plenary sessions, the Rada's next opportunity to find consensus and vote for a new Speaker is December 2. There is, similarly, no clear way out of the coalition stalemate at this juncture. Resolution of the two - Speaker and coalition - are intertwined. Given Yushchenko's low popularity, it would be very difficult for him to craft the type of unity government that Plyush and Baloha envisioned.

TAYLOR